

**WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

1. A computer-implemented method for animating a first avatar based on perceived animation of a second avatar, the method comprising:

graphically representing a first user with a first avatar capable of being animated;

5 graphically representing a second user with a second avatar capable of being animated wherein communication messages are being sent between the first user and the second user;

receiving an indication of an animation of the first avatar; and

in response to and based on the received indication of the animation, animating the

10 second avatar.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein receiving the indication of an animation comprises receiving an indication of any type of animation of the first avatar.

15 3. The method of claim 1 wherein receiving the indication of an animation comprises receiving an indication of a particular animation of multiple possible animations of the first avatar.

4. The method of claim 1 further comprising animating the first avatar in response to and based on the animation of the second avatar.

20 5. The method of claim 1 wherein the first avatar is animated in response to a particular portion of a message sent between the first user and the second user.

25 6. The method of claim 5 wherein the first avatar is animated in response to a particular portion of a message sent from the first user to the second user.

7. The method of claim 5 wherein the first avatar is animated in response to a particular portion of a message sent to the first user from the second user.

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8. The method of claim 1 wherein the first avatar is animated to send an out-of-band communication from the first user to the second user.

9. The method of claim 8 wherein the out-of-band communication comprises a communication indicating an environmental condition associated with the first user.

5 10. The method of claim 9 wherein the environmental condition comprises an environmental condition related to weather occurring in a geographic location near the first user.

10 11. The method of claim 8 wherein the out-of-band communication comprises a communication indicating a personality characteristic associated with the first user.

12. The method of claim 8 wherein the out-of-band communication comprises a communication indicating an emotional state associated with the first user.

15 13. The method of claim 8 wherein the out-of-band communication comprises a communication indicating a setting characteristic associated with the first user.

14. The method of claim 13 wherein the setting characteristic comprises a characteristic related to time of day of the first user.

20 15. The method of claim 12 wherein the setting characteristic comprises a characteristic related to time of year.

16. The method of claim 15 wherein the time of year comprises a holiday.

25 17. The method of claim 15 wherein the time of year comprises a season wherein the season is one of spring, summer, fall or winter

18. The method of claim 12 wherein the setting characteristic comprises a 30 characteristic associated with a work setting.

19. The method of claim 12 wherein the setting characteristic comprises a characteristic associated with a recreation setting.

20. The method of claim 19 wherein the recreation setting comprises a beach  
5 setting or a tropical setting.

21. The method of claim 19 wherein the recreation setting comprises a winter sport setting.

10 22. A system for animating a first avatar based on perceived animation of a second avatar, the system comprising a processor connected to a storage device and one or more input/output devices, wherein the processor is configured to:

graphically represent a first user with a first avatar capable of being animated;  
graphically represent a second user with a second avatar capable of being animated  
15 wherein communication messages are being sent between the first user and the second user;  
receive an indication of an animation of the first avatar; and  
animate the second avatar in response to and based on the received indication of the animation.

20 23. The system of claim 22 wherein the processor is configured to receive an indication of any type of animation of the first avatar.

24. The system of claim 22 wherein the processor is configured to receive an indication of a particular animation of multiple possible animations of the first avatar.

25 25. The system of claim 22 wherein the processor is further configured to animate the first avatar in response to and based on the animation of the second avatar.

26. The system of claim 22 wherein the processor is further configured to animate  
30 the first avatar in response to a particular portion of a message sent between the first user and the second user.

27. The system of claim 22 wherein the processor is further configured to animate the first avatar to send an out-of-band communication from the first user to the second user.

28. A computer-readable medium or propagated signal having embodied thereon a computer program configured to animate a first avatar based on perceived animation of a second avatar, the medium or signal comprising one or more code segments configured to:

graphically represent a first user with a first avatar capable of being animated;  
graphically represent a second user with a second avatar capable of being animated wherein communication messages are being sent between the first user and the second user;  
receive an indication of an animation of the first avatar; and  
animate the second avatar in response to and based on the received indication of the animation.

29. The medium of claim 28 wherein the one or more code segments configured to receive the indication of the animation of the first avatar comprise one or more code segments configured to receive an indication of any type of animation of the first avatar.

30. The medium of claim 28 wherein the one or more code segments configured to receive the indication of the animation of the first avatar comprise one or more code segments configured to receive an indication of a particular animation of multiple possible animations of the first avatar.

31. The medium of claim 28 wherein the one or more code segments are further configured to animate the first avatar in response to and based on the animation of the second user.

32. The medium of claim 28 wherein the one or more code segments are further configured to animate the first avatar in response to a particular portion of a message sent between the first user and the second user.

33. The medium of claim 28 wherein the one or more code segments are further configured to animate the first avatar to send an out-of-band communication from the first user to the second user.

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34. A system for animating a first avatar based on perceived animation of a second avatar, the system comprises:

means to graphically represent a first user with a first avatar capable of being animated and graphically represent a second user with a second avatar capable of being  
10 animated wherein communication messages are being sent between the first user and the second user;

means to receive an indication of an animation of the first avatar; and

means to animate the second avatar in response to and based on the received indication of the animation.